



*From the Cope Collection in Southampton University Library*

## The Eccentric Edifice

D. DEAN CANTRELL

Berry College, Mount Berry, GA 30149

The above print of a contemporary pen and wash watercolor is of Southampton Castle, the home of JA's landlord, the second Lord Landsdowne. Last summer Mr. G. Hampson, Keeper of Special Collections of Southampton University Library, kindly pulled the folder containing prints of Lord Landsdowne's castle as housed in the Cope Collection, which the library boasts is "everything in print about Hampshire and the Isle of Wight," amounting to about 7,000 books and pamphlets and about 4,000 maps, prints, and posters. In doing so he noted the hitherto absence of a request for a print of the contemporary watercolor and quite possibly it may be making its first appearance here.<sup>1</sup> Of course, as we know, the castle has been identified in prints of the Southampton skyline, most notably the one in Lord David Cecil's *A Portrait of Jane Austen* (p. 114), and a slightly different perspective reproduced in both Pinion's *A Jane Austen Companion* (facing p. 192) and in Dr. Chapman's *Jane Austen's Letters* (facing p. 192), both of which are in the Cope Collection.<sup>2</sup> The above watercolor is of interest because of its potential for casting some further light on JA's Southampton residence.

Entitled "Castle Southampton," the 174mm by 230mm contemporary watercolor on a piece of cartridge paper is undated and its artist, unfortunately, unknown. Of four illustrations of the castle in the Cope Collection, it is the only close-up view of the mansion. Rising above the city's famous walls, the cream-colored building displays quite clearly its distinctive architectural features. The trees, city walls, and grass are in a soft golden brown. The wind-buffed trees in the foreground enhance its Gothic quality. Bare of any surrounding structure, it appears in a congenial environment. With some exceptions, the castle as drawn conforms with what has appeared in print.

The brainchild of Lord Wycombe, later the 2nd Lord Landsdowne, the castellated mansion of brick and stucco sat on the remains of the fortress of Old Southampton Castle which dated to Richard II. In 1804 (just about two and a half years before Mrs. Austen, JA and Cassandra moved from Bath to Southampton) he purchased the Castle Hill, which had suffered depredations, and during the next five years (when the Austen women would have been at their home in a corner of Castle Square) became absorbed in its construction. Beginning the edifice on a small scale and without plan, he was so amused that he extended the building so that it became too large for the space it occupied. His neighbors were even more amused at the considerable amount of money it cost him as well as its lack of approach (which the painting does not substantiate). When he died on 15 November 1807 (a few months after the Austens' departure from Southampton to Chawton), his half-brother came into possession of it.

To JA devotees, her nephew JEAL has been the source of information about the castle. In his *Memoir*, the septugenarian confessed he had lively remembrance of it from the several times he had visited his grandmother and aunts there. He would have been at the time somewhere between eight and eleven years old. He called the castle "a fantastic edifice, too large for the space in which it stood, though too small to accord well with its castellated style. . . ." He also remembered that the Marchioness often rode in a light phaeton drawn by six, sometimes eight ponies of descending size and lightness of color. He delighted in looking down from the window of his Grandmother's "old-fashioned commodious house" at the "process" of ponies and phaeton maneuvering in the space that remained of the open square; he also remembered walking atop the city walls. He noted that upon the Marquis's death in 1809 the castle was torn down. His rather precise recollection of the castle creates something of a mystery to anyone who has seen the illustrations in the Cope Collection.

A slight discrepancy surrounds the size of the sham castle. Lord David Cecil called it a miniature; but Pinion described it as a huge "fantastic" Gothic edifice, both obviously picking up on the nephew's wording; Dr. Chapman merely labeled it "eccentric." A fourth illustration in the Cope Collection, a pencil drawing, rather primitively executed, of a man walking past the castle bailey wall, which unfortunately did not reproduce clearly enough to be printed here, corroborates the massiveness of the castle situated as it is on a tall mound.<sup>3</sup> The watercolor castle certainly

does not dwarf its space and does not appear a folly, as it does in the other three illustrations. Nor does it seem to be on a mound. Of great disappointment is its failure to show the Austens' home which might have been expected to be a part of the drawing.<sup>4</sup> Indeed a contemporary visitor wrote that the castle's door could scarcely be discovered because its base was entirely blocked up by houses. Of course, the unknown artist was free to take liberties with the perspective, blocking out any surrounding structure. No doubt the castle's tremendous river frontage—something like 380 feet—fed the Gothic imagination of the artist to the neglect of verisimilitude.

Two more JEAL recollections, though not called into question by the watercolor, do provide a prelude to a larger mystery. He identified the marchioness who delighted in maneuvering the pretty ponies and phaeton as the wife of JA's landlord; the *Victoria History* is the source for Lord Landsdowne's half-brother driving "about with four foresters not much bigger than Newfoundland dogs."

But the greatest mystery of all concerns JEAL's recollection that the castle was pulled down at the Marquis's death, that is in 1809. In fact, it was the half-brother who realizing the value of the building material put it up for sale just one year before JA died, that is, in July 1816, and finally had the building taken down the year after her death, in 1818. At that time also the mound was lowered. How may one make this historical account coincide with JEAL's recollection and the dates of the illustrations as seen in Cecil's, Pinion's and Dr. Chapman's books? How, we may ask, could a castle erected over the years 1804-09 be the object of an engraving published 20 April 1800, as is the one Cecil chose to reproduce? How, we may ask, could a castle torn down in 1818 be drawn by Tobias Young in 1819, as seen in Pinion and Dr. Chapman's reproductions? How could JEAL's recollections be accounted for—by a lapse of memory, perhaps?

JA offers little help here, not having in her sixteen letters bearing a Southampton postmark described the castle, an omission characteristic of her, as one of her more modern qualities is her avoidance of lengthy or even precise descriptions. She does, however, make some humor at Lord Landsdowne's expense. To Cassandra, who at Godmersham missed the move into the new house, JA wrote on February 1807: "Our Dressing-Table is constructed on the spot out of a large Kitchen Table belonging to the House for doing which we have the permission of Mr. Husket Lord Landsdowne's Painter,—domestic Painter I shd call him, for he lives in the Castle" (p. 178).

How are the mysteries to be cleared up? Undoubtedly a Nicolas Pevsener could solve them. It remains for us to bear in mind the word Mr. Hampson shared with me about the contemporary pen and wash watercolor: perhaps, he said, the unknown contemporary watercolorist did "romanticize" it a bit.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Mr. Hampson later disclosed the impossibility of ascertaining, owing to the lack of systematic record-keeping, whether it has been reproduced but judged it had not been so during the past generation.
- <sup>2</sup> Both may be seen in Southampton Library. Cecil's is of an engraving drawn by J. Smith, engraved by J. Powell and published on 20 April 1800; the other is drawn by Tobias Young, which Dr. Chapman credits to Harold Lankester.
- <sup>3</sup> By S. Prout.
- <sup>4</sup> The Austen home was either in front of the present Juniper Berry Public Inn or on the site of 23 Upper Bugle Street. Another Lankester print, destroyed in December 1940, presumably showed the outline of the house, which was torn down around 1900.